

Chapter 15

Preserve the Status Quo, or Move to Mexico

How Can We Tell When a Radical Leap is Really Warranted?

Kennon M. Sheldon^{1,2}

¹ International Laboratory of Positive Psychology of Personality and Motivation,
National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia

² Department of Psychology, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO, USA

Abstract: In this chapter I consider the profound course changes that people sometimes make in their lives, radically altering their careers, religions, lifestyles, family networks, living locations, and much more. Because such changes can be risky as well as beneficial, the question arises: how can people tell, in advance, whether a pondered course change is truly the right thing for them, rather than being merely an escapist fantasy? Will the change lead towards growth and happiness, or towards stasis and decline? To illustrate, I consider idiographic personal goal constructs, which are “thought-operants” having characteristics of both implicit and explicit motivational systems. I show that feeling self-determined in such goals is symptomatic of a self-concordant condition in which a person’s explicitly endorsed goals well-represent his or her implicit personality and potentials. In the language of humanism, an “organismic valuing process” has taken place, which gave the person deep (and accurate) insights about themselves, to use when it came to goal-selection. I describe an extended 1997 email conversation with Julius Kuhl, in which Julius explained PSI theory and helped me to arrive at my current understanding of self-concordance. Finally, and directly pertinent to the chapter title, I describe a 2014 email conversation with Kuhl, in which we derived a list of “symptoms” of holistic decision-making, markers that are consistent with both PSI and self-concordance theory. I suggest that would-be course-changers should carefully consider these various “markers of wholeness,” before making the jump.

From time to time we all ruminate about our present problems, and fantasize about making major changes in our lives – changes like quitting our current jobs to pursue a new career, divorcing our current spouses to pursue a new partner, or leaving our current town for a new town. For the most part we treat these fantasies as what they are: mere escapist fictions, wish-fulfillments, or coping strategies. Thus, rather than trying to enact the fantasies, we typically choose to preserve the status quo, continuing to cope with whatever problems it contains.

Still, it seems obvious that at times, radical life changes really *are* warranted and necessary. In other words, the status quo should not always be preserved! In such cases, perhaps our ruminations and fantasies contain accurate information about our situations? I.e., that the current job really *is* ill-suited for our skills, talents and interests, that the spouse really *is* mismatched with our values, goals, or favored leisure activities, or that the current town really *is* the problem? Furthermore, in such cases, might the fantasies also contain the *solution* to the problem(s) – namely, to make the life-change(s) suggested by the fantasy?

The question explored in this chapter is: what (if any) kind of internal information is available to the choice-maker, such that he/she can correctly choose which option to pick (i.e., preserve the status quo, or make a change?) When, and under what circumstances, do our momentary fantasies tell us the *truth* about what we should want and pick, versus being mere escapist fictions, which if indulged, would only lead to harmful disruptions within our lives?

My chapter title illustrates this dilemma via the phrase “Moving to Mexico.” Consider a certain entrepreneur, “Monique,” who has had a successful and rewarding career in a male-dominated world, but who now feels tired from both long-term and recent struggles within her job. Suppose that she finally gains the wherewithal to retire, to follow a new dream; however she could also continue working, following the original dream that led her to her successes so far. Should she give in to her fantasy of lounging on a palm-surrounded beach in Oaxaca? But what if the “lounging on a beach” scenario is just an escapist illusion? Should she instead realize that in Mexico she will sorely miss the challenges and the relationships of her job, that she will be bored, that she will stop taking care of herself, and begin a long slow decline? How could she perhaps tell in advance, in order to avoid the risk of making a potentially very costly mistake? (At a meta-level, I suspect that our retiring friend, Julius Kuhl, may face a similar dilemma: whether to keep working (perhaps at a reduced pace), or to do something radically different?)

This is a hugely difficult question, which I can only begin to consider in this chapter. I will draw from two different perspectives upon the issues, one based on my own self-concordance model of optimal goal striving (which is itself based in Deci and Ryan’s (1985, 2000) Self-determination theory), and the other based on Julius Kuhl’s Personality-systems-interaction (PSI) theory (Kuhl, 2000). As part of the inquiry I will reprint and discuss some excerpts from a long-running email exchange between Julius and I, which began back in 1996 when I was first developing the self-concordance model and which has continued to the present day. This discussion will show that the Self-concordance and PSI perspectives are quite compatible, despite the fact that self-concordance theory is based on humanistic premises and PSI theory is based on dynamical system premises. Accordingly, the two theories make some very similar types of recommendations for “how to know what to want.” However, there are also some very intriguing differences.

Stated in terms of Heckhausen and Gollwitzer’s “Action phases” model of goal pursuit (1987; Gollwitzer, 2012), the problems being addressed in this chapter concern the “Deliberations” phase of the process, when the person is still deciding what to do. According to Heckhausen and Gollwitzer, during this phase preferences are set between competing wishes by deliberating their desirability and feasibility. The output of this process is a decision, namely, to set and pursue a particular goal. Movement from Deliberation to Implementation was described as “the crossing of a Rubicon,” from a motivational state that is very open-ended (“what shall I do?”) to a very different motivational state involving a mental commitment (“I shall do this!”) and relevant implementation intentions (Gollwitzer, 1999).

To date, most personal goal research has focused on *post*-commitment phases: the processes by which goals, once set, are protected and shielded, executed and implemented, and finally, are either disengaged from or completed. Surprisingly little research attention has been focused on the *pre*-commitment phase, and the nature of the deliberative processes underlying goal selection. How are the various possible “wishes” identified, how are these wishes given differing weights, and how do

people deliberate among the wishes? Are these deliberations conscious or non-conscious, rational or irrational, automatic or controlled, parallel or sequential? Can people's deliberations go wrong, such that the person chooses a self-harmful course of action, rather than a course that would promote continued growth and fulfillment? Or perhaps it does not really matter what goals people select, as long as they commit to something – crossing the Rubicon to some kind, any kind, of action? Gollwitzer (1990) briefly addressed the Deliberations phase, saying that during this phase there should be cognitive tuning toward information relevant to the issues of feasibility and desirability, that there should be accurate and impartial processing of such information, and heightened receptivity to information in general. Thus, he adopted a conventional expectancy/value framework to address the issue of how people deliberate between options.

I was led to newly consider these questions by certain results I was getting as a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Rochester. First, some background information: I received my PhD from U. C. Davis in 1992 under the guidance of Dr. Robert Emmons, the inventor of the “personal strivings” goal construct (Emmons, 1989). Personal strivings are conceptualized as idiographic (subject-generated) constructs, because they are people's self-listed answers to the question “what are you typically striving for in your daily life?” Personal strivings are also conceptualized as motivational constructs, because they are goals – a special type of mental representation that is imbued with motivational energy. As such, strivings can serve as high-level standards within people's control hierarchies (or action systems; Carver & Scheier, 1981, 1998), providing the mental target against which the actual situation is compared, so that discrepancies can be detected and reduced via the functioning of the test-operate-test-exit (TOTE) cycle (Miller, Galanter, & Pribrum, 1960). As just one example of the kind of research questions the personal strivings methodology opens up, my dissertation research compared the personal strivings of artists, physicists, and ecologists, finding that scientists listed more strivings involving “emotional control” than did artists (Sheldon, 1994), and finding that both creative artists and creative scientists (as rated by faculty) felt a stronger sense of efficacy about their handling of internal conflicts among their various strivings, compared to their less creative colleagues (Sheldon, 1995).

When I arrived at Rochester I decided to ask participants to rate the “Perceived locus of causality” (PLOC) for each of the personal strivings they had just listed. The PLOC idea was an exciting new construct being explored at Rochester at that time, following on the heels of Ryan and Connell's seminal 1989 article. In that article Ryan and Connell (1989) proposed the relative autonomy continuum, upon which various types of motivation to do “X” could be lined up in a quasi-simplex structure according to the degree they have been internalized into the self. In sequence, the forms of motivation are (1) “external” motivation (“because I have to or will be punished if I don't”), which has an external locus of causality, followed by (2) “introjected” motivation (“because I make myself do it, to avoid guilt”), which has a somewhat more internal locus of causality because at least the *self* (rather than external circumstances) is felt to force the action, followed by (3) “identified” motivation (“because it is important and valuable to me”), which is fully internalized because there is no longer internal resistance to the behavior, finally followed by (4) “intrinsic” motivation (“because it is interesting and enjoyable”), which is automatically internal, because it represents the person's developing interests and passions and is done for its own sake (i.e., the experience itself is the reward).

The PLOC continuum is valuable because it integrates many historically important prior motivation theories into a unified framework. For example, operant behaviorism focuses on external motivation; psychodynamic and Freudian theories focus on introjected motivation; existential and personality-developmental theories focus on identified motivation; cognitive-developmental and well-being theories focus on intrinsic motivation. The PLOC continuum is also valuable because it provides a kind of stage model of adult personality development, in which development is driven by people's inherent tendency to move from external to more internal forms of motivation over time

(in SDT, this is the “organismic integration” process). Supporting the existence of such an inherent tendency, during their teenage years children typically become more identified with non-enjoyable activities like cleaning up after themselves, or doing well in school. That is, they begin to do such activities for their own reasons, rather than just to avoid punishments or to get monetary or other tangible rewards (Chandler & Connell, 1987). People continue to internalize their motivations as they age, for example their motivations for performing various social duties like voting, tipping, or tax-paying (Sheldon, Houser-Marko, Kasser, Jones, & Turban, 2005). This shows that the organismic integration process continues throughout the lifespan (Sheldon & Kasser, 2001; Sheldon, Houser-Marko, & Kasser, 2006; see Sheldon, 2009, for a review).

Back in 1992, some at Rochester suggested that I needn’t bother assessing the level of self-determination of people’s self-generated personal strivings. The measure would not predict anything, because there would be no variability in it (i.e., a ceiling effect would obtain). Why was a ceiling effect expected? Because personal strivings are *by definition* self-determined: they represent people’s spontaneous answers to the open-ended question, “what are you trying to do in your life?” No explicit suggestions, advices, or recommendations are given to participants as to how they should “fill in the blanks” on the goal elicitation sheet, meaning that their goals perform are determined by them.

Still, I found that many participants filled in the blanks with strivings that they then rated as NON-self-determined according to the PLOC methodology – strivings underlain by pressures, guilt, and shame, by misbegotten or outgrown ideals, or by desires to please or mollify important others. In our first publications on this phenomenon, showing the negative well-being effects of feeling controlled rather than autonomous in one’s personal strivings (Sheldon & Kasser, 1995), we conceptualized the PLOC-based measure as an index of personality integration, and referred to the measure as “striving self-determination.” We chose this name because the striving PLOC measure makes use of items originally designed to assess self-determined domain motivation, i.e., the feeling of being autonomous rather than controlled in the domains of academics, sports, health, relationships, work, and so on. Essentially, the choice of the term “striving self-determination” makes the assumption that feeling controlled in pursuing one’s self-listed personal strivings is no different from feeling controlled in some contextual or behavioral domain, like doing one’s homework, or taking out the garbage. In fact, some within the SDT community would continue to describe the measure in this way.

But back in 1996, I began to wonder if the measure might really be indexing something else. Personal strivings are “thought-operants” (Emmons & McAdams, 1991; McClelland, 1985), meaning that they are midway between what are now called implicit and explicit measures (McClelland, Koestner, & Weinberger, 1989). Given that strivings are to some extent projections, written onto a blank sheet of paper, they provide a kind of window upon non-conscious processes. But given that strivings are also self-reports (concerning what one wants), it is possible that what appears in that window could be wrong. In other words, people’s consciously listed strivings might be mistaken or distorted with respect to “what is really in there” – what the person really does want or need at a deep level, what he or she would most benefit from doing.

This idea is consistent with what most motivation researchers now believe, that implicit and explicit motive measures are typically independent of each other, even when the measures concern the same theme, such as how achievement- or relationship-oriented the person is. The reason for the independence, of course, is that people have little direct verbal access to the processes which actually direct their behavior (McClelland et al., 1989). As a result, explicit measures of motivation reflect self-presentational and self-conceptual processes that may be irrelevant to how the person actually behaves in a projective or open-ended situation. In the same sense, the Emmons (1989) measure of personal strivings, which forces participants to make explicit their typical behavioral strivings and wishes, might yield strivings which are irrelevant to the person’s actual motivational

and personality dispositions. As a result, actively pursuing such strivings might fail to represent the person's growth- and health-seeking impulses.

According to this line of thought, the striving PLOC measure reveals the "fit" of the person's consciously stated goals with his or her deeper personality processes. In other words, when a person has managed to select goals which well-represent her implicit motivations and dispositions, he or she feels self-determined in pursuing those goals, rather than feeling controlled by external forces. Thus feelings of striving self-determination are diagnostic of a positive motivational state in which implicit and explicit, conscious and non-conscious, and controlled and automatic processes are well-aligned. In the "massive parallel constraint satisfaction" problem that is life (Read, Vanman, & Miller, 1997), the person's decision processes have somehow managed to arrive at choices which optimize the potential for growth, development, and fulfillment.

Based on this thinking (considerably helped by conversations with Julius Kuhl, described below), I coined the term "self-concordance" to describe the striving PLOC measure. This term was chosen to reflect the idea that conscious goals have some degree of functional autonomy from the rest of the psychological system, opening up the possibility that sometimes goals may be pursued that work *against* the system's integrity and well-being (non-concordant goals). In a sense, the wrong executives are at the head of the corporation. In contrast, self-concordant goals were defined as ones which well-represent and serve the overall system. The very process of pursuing self-concordant goals provides the system with psychological nutrients (Sheldon & Elliot, 1998, 1999; Sheldon & Kasser, 1998), affording it many opportunities to grow and expand, to become more differentiated and integrated (Sheldon & Emmons, 1995; Werner, 1957). In this view, the self-concordance measure directly indexes the degree of alignment or fit between goals and deeper self (see Figure 15.1).

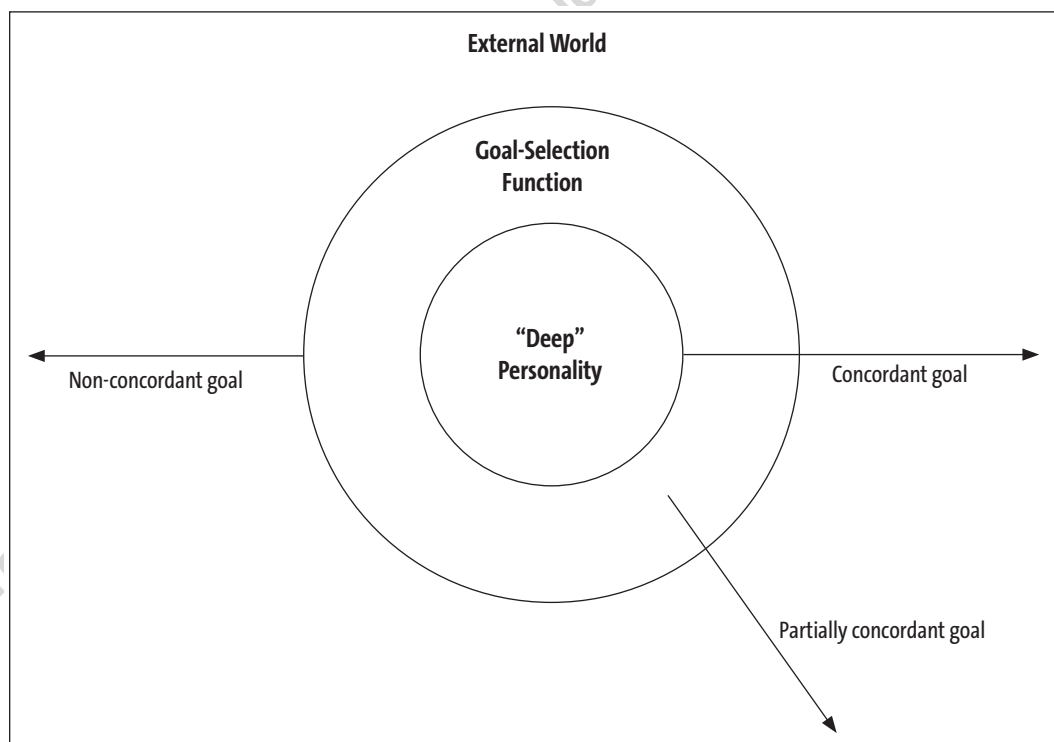


Figure 15.1. Illustration of the "onion" idea of the degree of alignment or fit between goals and deeper self, adapted from Sheldon (2014).

Notice that it would be very desirable if the PLOC measure of self-concordance really *did* index goal/deeper personality fit, because it would pre-empt the difficult necessity of trying to directly assess people's non-conscious motives, implicit attitudes, or latent growth trends. For example, in the case of non-conscious motive assessment, it would pre-empt the onerous researcher labor of content-coding hundreds of participant essays. In the case of implicit attitude assessment, it would pre-empt the onerous participant labor of doing hundreds of reaction time trials, a technique known to produce measures of sometimes-questionable validity and interpretability.

But can a mere likert-based measure *really* give information about the congruence between implicit and explicit personality? I will consider this question in two ways. First, I will describe data showing that rated self-concordance is associated with matching between implicit and explicit motivations, as my interpretation of the striving PLOC measure predicts. Second, I will review some humanistic theory, especially Carl Rogers' conception of the "organismic valuing process," which claims that in certain conditions and in certain ways, consciousness can have direct access to non-conscious information.

In terms of data, Sheldon and Cooper (2008) conducted a within-subject study asking participants to list both achievement and relationship goals they pursue. Sheldon and Cooper (2008) showed that participants high in explicit achievement motivation had higher rated self-concordance for their achievement goals than their relationship goals, with the converse pattern occurring for those high in intimacy motivation. Sheldon and Schöler (2011) conducted a between-subjects study randomly assigning participants to pursue either achievement OR relationship goals over a semester. They showed the same pattern in which motive/goal matching predicted rated self-concordance. Sheldon, Prentice, Halusic, and Schöler (2015) also used both explicit (i.e. PRF) and implicit (i.e. PSE) motive disposition measures of both intimacy and achievement motivation, to show that greater self-concordance results when assigned goals that match motives (explicit or implicit). To illustrate, a finding from that article is represented in Figure 15.2; it shows that participants high in nAff as measured by the implicit PSE measure rated their self-concordance higher when randomly assigned to pursue affiliation goals. Thus, the claim that rated self-concordance is diagnostic of motive/goal fit has received considerable support.

Theoretically, how could a self-report measure give information about non-conscious processes? And, if people really have an ability to tell whether their current goals are concordant with their own deeper needs, why would they ever select non-concordant goals in the first place? My suspicion is that people cannot know "what to want" directly. Conscious goals are mere guesses, reflecting people's current situations, their lay theories about themselves and about right living, and much else. Still, people can know how they feel about the guesses, that is, what they THINK they want. For example: Consider a young woman who is striving to become a champion figure skater, a goal she has pursued ever since she was a little girl. Consciously she embraces the goal, but something is wrong: she experiences frequent bouts of depression and has been treated for self-cutting. If this young woman were asked (in a confidential setting) to rate her PLOC for skating, she would be able to report that she feels pressured to skate by her controlling mother, that that she is racked by guilt over her own shortcomings, that she does not really enjoy skating, that she feels more attracted to some other sport or passion. Given her fear-based commitment to retaining her mother's love (Wuyts, Vansteenkiste, Soenens, & Assor, 2015), she cannot let herself realize (or say) directly that skating is wrong for her; that skating is not helping her to develop her true potentials, that it is not meeting her needs. Nevertheless, the information can still be revealed, by a motivational analysis of her reasons for performing the behavior. Of course, explaining this interpretation to her, and convincing her that she needs to make changes, might be a different matter entirely! In this sense, the formerly non-conscious information ("skating isn't right for me") can remain inert, even though it has now passed through consciousness.

This example well fits the humanistic ideas and writings of Carl Rogers (1964), including his notion that there is an "organismic valuing process" (OVP) that can help people to decide what is

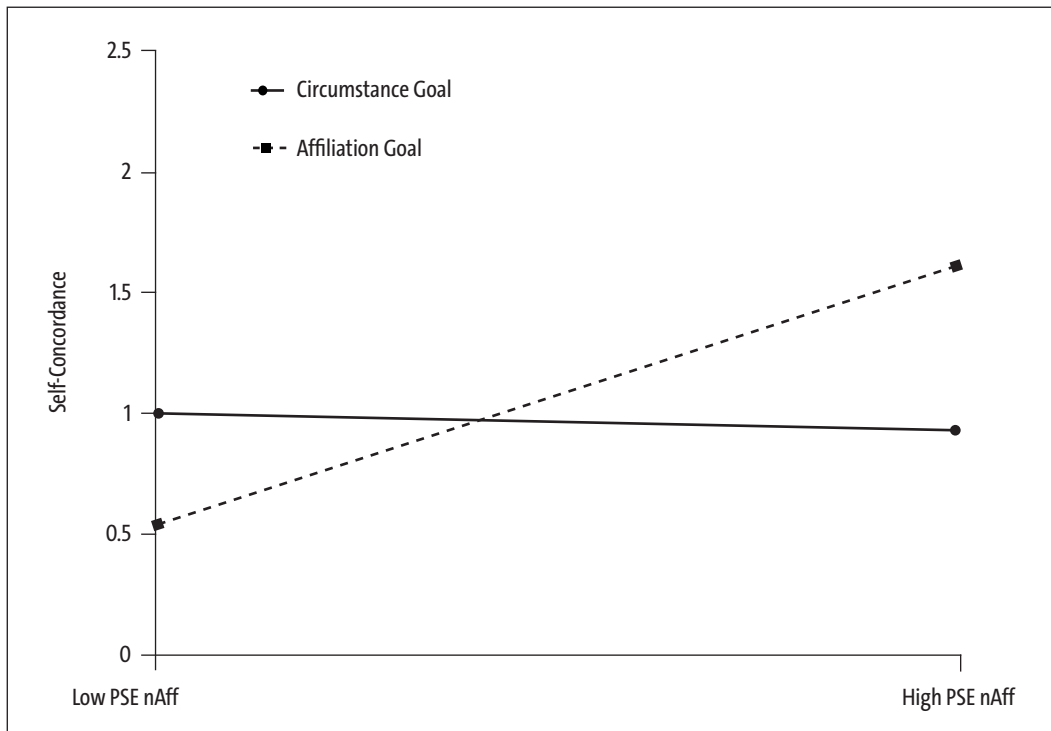


Figure 15.2. Self-concordance as a function of implicit need for affiliation (nAff, as measured by the Picture Story Exercise) and random goal assignment, adapted from Sheldon, Prentice, et al. (2015).

most important to them, what is most real and authentic. The cornerstone of Rogers' humanistic approach was the assumption that "there is something deeper in there" – some kind of true self, holistic personality, or best mode of functioning, which a person might potentially learn (over time) to recognize and draw into his or her conscious experience, thereby supporting and strengthening the functioning of these positive growth impulses. According to Rogers the OVP can become activated when a good therapist provides the right environment and asks the right questions, perhaps finally helping the young woman to realize and acknowledge that in fact, she really *doesn't* want to be a skater. By this means, effective psychotherapy can help people overcome the divide between their implicit growth potentials, which have become thwarted and stalled due to over-exposure to conditional positive regard, and their limiting self-concept, with its conditions of worth and network of negative self-evaluations.

However, more recent research indicates that the OVP often operates spontaneously, without the intervention of a therapist. Sheldon, Arndt, and Houser-Marko (2003) showed a "biased shift" effect such that when asked to either recall or reconsider their past value choices, participants tended to shift towards intrinsic (growth-promoting) goals and away from extrinsic (growth-forestalling) goals. This occurred at time scales ranging from just a few minutes, to weeks, to months. Furthermore, Sheldon (2005) showed that college students shifted (on average) towards intrinsic (growth, connection oriented) values and away from extrinsic (money, appearance) values over their college careers. With rare exceptions (i.e., Sheldon & Krieger, 2004, for a study of the law school career), when people change in their values, they change for the better. Again, I believe that this is indicative of the existence of an organismic valuing (Sheldon et al., 2003) or organismic integration (Deci & Ryan, 1991) process that typically occurs within humans, in which consciousness can "catch

up” with what the person is feeling, enabling the person to improve their goals and to re-establish a growth trajectory. This particular conception of maturation has always made sense to me, and it is also an idea seen in countless stories, biographies and growth narratives, in both literature and film – narratives in which people finally learn “what to want,” after years or even decades of pursuing ultimately vain and illusory ideals. The story of Ebenezer Scrooge is one such narrative, and the story of the Grinch who stole Christmas is another.

It was at this point in 1996 that I first emailed Julius Kuhl, wondering if he had ever viewed goals in this way. I had already become familiar with Kuhl’s ideas while co-authoring a chapter with Bob Emmons and Laura King (Emmons, King, & Sheldon, 1993). In that chapter I wrote a section on the “motivational maintenance mechanisms” considered by Kuhl in the 1980s, that is, mechanisms by which people keep their nose to the grindstone to accomplish things they don’t enjoy doing, or are tempted to abandon. These mechanisms included “attention control” (not letting oneself think about alternatives that might interfere with completing one’s intentions, for example by suppressing images of cupcakes while trying to stay on a diet), “motivation control” (mentally boosting the appeal or value of one’s current intentions, for example by anticipating how good one will look after following the diet), and “environmental control” (not letting oneself occupy environments that might undermine one’s intentions, for example by not going into the doughnut shop). Of course, all of these motivational maintenance processes concern *post*-commitment or post-Rubicon phases of goal pursuit. However, Julius also considered *pre*-commitment processes that might facilitate goal-system functioning. One relevant mechanism was “information control,” in which one is able to choose to stop processing information so that a decision can now be reached.

I emailed Julius to ask him more about the latter mechanism, wondering if non-concordant goals arise because people stop processing information too soon, before their OVP has had a complete opportunity to speak. Little did I know what was about to occur: a long and highly stimulating conversation concerning the overlaps between Julius’ then-developing PSI theory, and my own developing ideas about goal self-concordance. At that early time in my career when I was still looking for re-assurance that I was on the right (or at least a good) track, Julius’s ideas were truly inspirational for me. Not only had he thought of goals in this way, he was in most ways far ahead of me! But, he was very willing to take as much time as needed to explain his views to me, both by email and in person (during a three-week period I spent in Osnabrück in 1997, at Julius’ invitation).

Unfortunately, I cannot locate any emails from Julius from 1996–1997: my inbox from that time is gone. I can only find my own *sent* mail from this period, including my initial email to him, and also, my responses to all that he said thereafter. Below I reprint part of my initial email, then salient sections of my later responses to Julius’s ongoing responses. Thus, Julius will serve as a voice that is not directly heard, just as the deeper self or daimon may not be directly heard (Sheldon, 2014)!

Before I present this one-sided conversation, however, let me provide a brief overview of PSI theory (see <http://www.psych-it.com.au/Psychlopedia/article.asp?id=78>). Unfortunately, my chapter cannot give PSI theory anywhere near as much attention as it deserves, but the passage below gives some context.

Personality system interaction theory is a comprehensive framework that shows how emotions and personality affect cognition and behavior. Specifically, this theory proposes that four cognitive systems underpin the regulation of behavior, motivation, and emotion. First, when individuals feel relaxed, an intuitive system, called extension memory, is activated. This system improves various forms of intuitive decision making, flexibility, creativity, resilience, engagement, and some other key outcomes. Second, when individuals feel anxious, a threat system, called object recognition, is activated instead. This system focuses attention towards immediate needs, often to the detriment of broader values. Third, when individuals feel dejected, an analytical

system, called intention memory is activated. This system forms plans to redress any shortfalls or complications, and these plans sometimes diverge from the core values and preferences of individuals as well as disregard subtle cues in the environment. Finally, if these intentions seem plausible, cheerful feelings arise, and a fourth system, called intuitive behavioral control, is activated. This system executes the intentions, coordinating the corresponding action plans. (Moss, 2016)

According to PSI theory (Kuhl, 2000; for a brief overview see Chapter 2 in this volume) there are inhibitions and modulations among systems; for example, when intention memory is active, access to extension memory is limited (once the Rubicon is crossed, one becomes focused and it is hard to go back to see the big picture). Positive affect tends to facilitate self-access and extension memory, creating more holistic functioning, whereas negative affect tends to reduce self-access and boost intention memory, creating more rigid or inflexible functioning. Kuhl's early research (Kuhl & Kraska, 1989) focused on the third system, and the various "motivational maintenance mechanisms" that can shield difficult intentions from being usurped. As considered above, however, what if some intentions *shouldn't* be shielded and protected? What if the intentions were formed while the person was in a state of impaired or inadequate self-access, and what if the person's ambivalence is an important signal of this inner division? When I first contacted Julius he had recently begun focusing on the extension memory system, as a means of conceptualizing the very questions posed by this chapter (i.e., "preserve the status quo, or move to Mexico?"). Extension memory involves people's ability to (at times) integrate, via massive parallel processing, information concerning their entire personality system – simultaneously taking multiple constraints and needs into account, to output the optimal decision that the person should make. Other aspects of PSI theory will become apparent in the conversation below.

Sheldon, March, 1996: "Hello, I'm writing because I have data that seems interpretable in terms of your motivational maintenance theory, but I'm not sure what the interpretation should be. Why not go to the source?" (I described the striving methodology and my curious results.)

"What's puzzling is that the goals were self-identified and chosen but didn't seem to be 'fully chosen,' in the case of controlled goals. Because they were self-chosen we can't say they were falsely self-ascribed, as in your 1994 JPSP article, in which people forget that the goal wasn't really self-generated but instead was put on them by the environment." (I received a long reply from Julius, describing the various motivational and memory systems, how the systems function differently in the presence of positive and negative affect, and how the quality of a person's goals vary as a result.)

Sheldon, April 1996: "Thanks for your stimulating response! I had been thinking of saying in our paper that your notion of self-marked intentions does not go far enough because personal strivings are nominally self-marked, but may not be truly Self-marked. However it seems you have arrived at the same conclusion. It's interesting to hear you talking in language compatible with self-determination theory, and I like the application to information-processing dynamics, which is sometimes lacking in Deci and Ryan. Your idea that one might have impaired access to one's self-system also seems convergent with Rogerian theory (i.e., conforming to 'conditions of worth' may obscure one's access to inner valuing processes) and also psychodynamic theory (i.e., ego-investments and defenses may block awareness of one's actual motives and impulses). It is very interesting to see your cognitive approach converging with these 'hotter' perspectives!

I have a couple of follow-up questions. What do you consider this integrated self to be? Are its values and preferences pre-existent, accessible in memory under the right conditions? Or are they created on-line as the person encounters choice points? If the latter, perhaps some of these on-line syntheses/momentary integrations better weight and reconcile the person's potentially competing interests than others, and that's what makes them more valid?" (I received another long reply from Julius, proposing that some modes of functioning enable better connection of people's volitional

processes with deeper personality processes, such that the resulting goal choices better result the totality of the personality system.)

Sheldon, May 1996: “I liked your view of integrative decision-making processes, in which multiple constraint satisfaction mechanisms are implicitly activated and included, such that the best compromise between them is achieved. I am interested in the phenomenological experiences which precede and accompany these integration outcomes.” (Another long reply from Julius, talking about the difference between action-oriented and state-oriented individuals. The former are able to set and pursue goals in an effective way. The latter become bogged down, unable to effectively enact intentions. Kuhl further distinguished between two types of state orientation: hesitation and preoccupation.)

Sheldon, June 1996: “Let me test my understanding by portraying two types of state-oriented people, gleaned from your descriptions. ‘Hamlet’ types (those high on the hesitation scale) are low in positive affect; they are in touch with self-feelings, but out of touch with the action system. ‘Kafka’ types (those high in the preoccupation scale) are high in negative affect, anxious and aroused; they are more in touch with the action system, but less in touch with self-feelings, especially when stressed.”

There followed further discussion, of the connections between PSI, SDT, and self-concordance; of the distinctions between global vs local processes, conscious vs unconscious processes, and between automatic vs controlled processes; and of different types of impaired self-access, as illustrated by the cases of “Hamlet” and “Kafka.” Much of our discussion presaged and anticipated the now-popular distinction between system 1 functioning (system 1 is an evolutionarily primitive, automatic type of non-conscious cognition in which massive parallel processing occurs) and system 2 functioning (system 2 is an evolutionarily more recent, controlled type of conscious cognition in which attention focuses sequentially processing limited information; Kahneman, 2011).

My conversation with Julius resumed in summer 2014, when Nicola Baumann asked me to write a chapter for this volume. I emailed Julius about the “moving to Mexico” example, and asked about his current thoughts on the matter. How can the entrepreneur, Monique, tell if moving to Mexico is the right thing for her, versus whether continuing in her difficult but formerly rewarding job is instead the right thing for her? More broadly, how can we tell whether any particular decision is truly the best one for that person? What if the decision is sudden and radical (i.e., dropping everything and moving to Mexico), does that mean it is more likely to be impulsive and incorrect? Also, how do these questions play into the free will versus determinism debate – are we really “free” to reorganize everything within a single moment? Below is an excerpt from this conversation, in which finally, Julius’ voice can be heard directly!

Kuhl: “Total change of mind (radical self-revision) is no problem in a nonlinear system: Being itself a slow-moving high-level system, the self interacts – along with slow moving/high level intention memory (ego) – with fast moving low level systems (object recognition and intuitive behavior control). In systems theory (you may be acquainted with the most popular version of it: chaos theory), this interaction (called a master-slave interaction) is one of the prerequisites for a sudden shift to a new ‘Gestalt’.”

This is also one of the reasons why it is legitimate to talk about freedom of self-determination: In non-linear interactions (let alone when they involve incredibly complex connectionist architectures) causal determination and predictability can dissociate: The system may be unpredictable (like the weather when trying to be very precise down to msec and mm: when and where will how many rain drops fall). Because of its own nonlinear complexity and the nonlinear interactions with partner systems, a system like the self is not fully predictable, does not have a foreseeable future (except for probability estimates of some very rough aspects), while being fully deterministic in a local sense. The theory of nonlinear systems and their self-organizational features leads to a ‘libertarian form of compatibilism’: Self-determination is in principle compatible with the notion of determinism (even when being very creative or even revolutionary, the self causally determines behavior, however,

without being fully predictable – because even little changes in the internal or external world can produce large scale changes in behavior). Most of the Freedom of Will debate is still based on an obsolete concept of (linear, mono-) causality. When extended to cover multi-causal nonlinear determination (involving, e.g., reciprocal causality) even full causality does not imply predictability any longer. This is difficult to grasp intuitively on an abstract level, but it is very easy to verify when looking at the behavior of very simple nonlinear systems that combine unpredictability even with full causal determination.”

Sheldon: “Thanks for the ideas! I am somewhat familiar with the chaos theory, dynamical system approach you describe. The question I am posing is, how do you know when it is a true reorganization that should be followed (one SHOULD quit one’s job and move to Mexico), versus just a coping strategy that looks very appealing right now, but ultimately, will be the wrong thing for you? A person can be very convinced right now that X is the right thing to do, and X can be a radical departure from the past, but X can also be a mistake. I would claim that phenomenology can tell us – if one wants to do X to get a reward, avoid punishment, or derive pleasure, but not because X offers interesting new developmental challenges or expresses deeply-held values, then X might be wrong... and one’s friends might know this too, even if the current conscious self does not.”

Kuhl: “Unfortunately, phenomenal experience does not easily tell us, whether a sudden change of decision is based on deep self-awareness (combined with a well-developed integrated self). But we can derive some criteria from the list of functional profiles of ego vs. self. That is one reason why I put so much effort in specifying the functional profiles of macro-systems.

When the state of mind during the period before a change of decision occurred, is characterized by ...

- inner calmness
- moderate emotionality (rather than sober analytical thinking or even rumination)
- inner broadening (as a phenomenal indication of extension memory)
- openness (any thought and feeling was welcome) rather than defensiveness (certain suggestion of others or inner voices are not given time and space for developing),

... then the likelihood should increase that the integrated self was involved.

Sheldon: “Fascinating! These seem to be clear markers by which a person can decide whether to trust a radical impulse within themselves. But what if the favored decision changes again the next day, as further reflection occurs – which decision should we trust?”

Kuhl: “A decision based on an efficiently operating self is likely to be very stable (because it is based on multiple constraint satisfaction, that is most relevant aspects are taken into account in an integrative and creative rather than an analytical way) – compare Luther’s answer to the representatives of the pope in Worms: ‘Here I stand, and I cannot do otherwise.’ But such a decision can also be changed quickly when some crucial (not peripheral) constraints (aspects, conditions) change: EM (extension memory underlying the integrated self) can take changes very quickly into account and compute a new decision (a well-developed connectionist network can do the weighing in a much more intelligent way than any analytical algorithm).

In contrast, an ego-based decision can remain stubbornly fixed (even when highly relevant changes occur) because it may suppress alternatives through self-control or it can suddenly change even when changes of low relevance occur (post-decisional regret). Another issue concerns the flow of control: If the self or the ego is more controlled by bottom-up processes (emotions, needs, impulses, temperament) than by its top-down impact on those processes (I call it the the Coupe-mode: ego or self are infiltrated by sub-cognitive forces).”

That ended the conversation in 2014. Now, in 2016, I am finally writing this chapter! What does all of the foregoing tell us, perhaps about Monique and her fantasy of moving to Mexico? And more generally, about the question of whether it is possible to know, just through one’s experience, what are the healthiest and most growth-promoting decisions to make and goals to pursue?

In fact, the list of symptoms to look for, in deciding whether to trust one's impulse, is becoming rather long. The self-concordance model symptoms are easily specified: the new life-goal should be one which promises to bring greater challenge, engagement, learning, and growth (i.e., one will have strong intrinsic motivation for doing the new life-goal, at least compared to the old life-goal). The new life-goal should be one which expresses strongly-held, or perhaps just newly-held, values; the person should feel that an important part of their identity, or an aspired-to identity, is expressed by the new goal (i.e., one will have strong identified motivation for doing the new goal). The new life-goal should *not* be associated with guilt, shame, or anxiety, or contingent self-esteem (i.e., introjected motivation); these are symptoms of self-division, suggesting that more work and reflection needs to be done. Also, the new life-goal should not be motivated primarily by material or status concerns (external motivation); these are also symptoms of a value system which is unlikely to bring true fulfillment to the person. The person is better advised to try to uncover the reasons he/she yearns for these compensatory substitutes, before he or she crosses the Rubicon.

In fact, new research (Sheldon, Prentice, & Halusic, 2016) is showing the benefits of engaging in such preliminary reflections. All previous self-concordance research has assessed goal-PLOC after the set of goals has been identified (i.e., after the Rubicon has been crossed). But recently Sheldon et al. (2016) asked some participants to rate self-concordance for a set of *candidate* goals prior to selecting a subset of those goals for actual pursuit. As predicted, those randomly assigned to consider their goal-motivations *before* crossing the Rubicon selected fewer extrinsic and more intrinsic goals, compared to those in the post-Rubicon condition. That is, they were better able to select goals of a type that is more likely to bring personality development and heightened well-being (see Kasser, 2002, for a full exposition of the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic goal content). It is not that participants realize *directly* what they want. However, becoming consciously aware of the motivations underlying the potential choices can be helpful in its own right. Once this information is focal in conscious awareness, it can impact decision-making ("hmmm, maybe I shouldn't choose a goal that I just said I don't enjoy?").

What else might participants consider, before they make their goal-decisions – for example, what can PSI tell them? Again, self-concordance theory is based on the onion metaphor presented in Figure 15.1, a humanistic idea which posits that there is a "true" personality state or growth propensity, which people can learn to express and further develop via their wise goal choices. In contrast, PSI theory is based on dynamic interactions between emotions, cognitions, and volitions, while containing the notion that the momentary conscious agent may not be informed by deeper processes (specifically, because access to extension memory is being inhibited by negative affect). The self-concordance perspective may be more metaphorical and less mechanistic, but possibly it can provide narratives that better help people to escape their current mental structures. The PSI perspective may be less phenomenological and more computable, but may fail to provide people with compelling narratives regarding their own self-development.

Still, the PSI perspective goes considerably beyond the self-concordance perspective, in terms of describing possible symptoms of fully-self-informed decision-making. As suggested by Julius above, such decision-making may be characterized by: (a) feelings of inner calmness as one contemplates the change; and (b) also feeling at least moderate positive affect (i.e., peacefulness, satisfaction, contentedness); and (c) also feeling that the world (and the self) have become clearer in that moment, such that the mists have parted to reveal what is really needed and desired, underneath; and (d) also feeling open to the possibility that one's mind might change (or develop) yet again, rather than (e) feeling that the new decision must be grasped and defended at all costs. In essence, these are all symptoms of extension-memory activation rather than intention-memory activation. According to PSI, at least during the deliberation phase, extension-memory involvement is better or more suitable because it is more likely to output a decision that maximizes the result for the whole system. Of course, at some point, one must make some decision and enter the implementation phase of action,

after which it becomes adaptive to shield the selected goals, at least to some extent, from continual re-consideration (if not, then one may suffer from the “Hamlet” condition, namely, hesitation-based state orientation). But even so, as Julius points out, one must remain open to further re-organization, else one may be stuck in the “Kafka” condition of fixating helplessly upon what is obviously not working (preoccupation-based state orientation).

To summarize, self-concordance theory and PSI theory have similar insights and approaches to the central question of how people can “know what to want.” Both theories agree, with Carl Rogers, that there is a true or deeper personality state that people may or may not be attuned with, consciously. Self-concordance theory (via SDT) focuses more on interpersonal and contextual dynamics as the cause of non-concordance, as in the case of the figure skater who is in thrall to the wishes of her mother. PSI theory focuses more on proximal intrapersonal dynamics, involving the interplay between different emotional and cognitive systems. In PSI theory, the young figure skater is dominated by intention memory, attempting to protect her non-concordant intentions from becoming usurped by something else. In both theories, it would be desirable to find ways to boost her self-insight (extension memory/organismic valuing process), and probably also her courage, so that she might make the changes needed to bring her conscious strivings into alignment with her actual personality and growth potentials.

Acknowledgments

This article was prepared within the framework of a subsidy granted to the HSE by the Government of the Russian Federation for the implementation of the Global Competitiveness Program.

Corresponding author

Kennon M. Sheldon
sheldonk@missouri.edu

References

- Carver, C. & Scheier, M. (1981). *Attention and self-regulation: A control theory approach to human behavior*. New York, NY: Springer-Verlag. <http://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4612-5887-2>
- Carver, C. & Scheier, M. (1998). *On the self-regulation of behavior*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. <http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139174794>
- Chandler, C. L., & Connell, J. P. (1987). Children's intrinsic, extrinsic and internalized motivation: A developmental study of children's reasons for liked and disliked behaviours. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 5, 357–365. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-835X.1987.tb01072.x>
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York, NY: Plenum. <http://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4899-2271-7>
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1991). A motivational approach to self: Integration in personality. In R. Dienstbier (Ed.), *Nebraska symposium on motivation: Vol. 38. Perspectives on motivation* (pp. 237–288). Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Deci, E. L. & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11, 227–268. http://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01
- Emmons, R. A. (1989). The personal strivings approach to personality. In L. A. Pervin (Ed.), *Goal concepts in personality and social psychology* (pp. 87–126). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Emmons, R. A., King, L. A., & Sheldon, K. M. (1993). Goal conflict and the self regulation of action. In D. M. Wegner & J. M. Pennebaker (Eds.), *Handbook of mental control* (pp. 528–551). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

- Emmons, R. A. & McAdams, D. P. (1991). Personal strivings and motive dispositions: Exploring the links. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 17, 648–654. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0146167291176007>
- Gollwitzer, P. (1990). Action phases and mind-sets. In E. T. Higgins & R. Sorrentino (Eds.), *Handbook of Motivation and Cognition: Foundations of Social Behavior* (Vol. 2, pp. 53–92). New York, NY: Guilford.
- Gollwitzer, P. (1999). Implementation intentions: Strong effects of simple plans. *American Psychologist*, 54, 493–503. <http://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.54.7.493>
- Gollwitzer, P. M. (2012). Mindset theory of action phases. In P. A. M. Van Lange, A. W. Kruglanski, & T. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (pp. 526–545). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Heckhausen, H., & Gollwitzer, P. M. (1987). Thought contents and cognitive functioning in motivational versus volitional states of mind. *Motivation and Emotion*, 11, 101–120. <http://doi.org/10.1007/BF00992338>
- Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux.
- Kasser, T. (2002). *The high price of materialism*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Kuhl, J. (2000). A functional-design approach to motivation and self-regulation: The dynamics of personality systems and interactions. In M. Boekaerts & P. Pintrich (Eds.), *Handbook of self-regulation* (pp. 111–169). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Kuhl, J., & Kraska, K. (1989). Self-regulation and metamotivation: Computational mechanisms, development, and assessment. In R. Kanfer, R. Cudeck, R. Kanfer, R. Cudeck (Eds.), *Abilities, motivation, and methodology: The Minnesota Symposium on Learning and Individual Differences* (pp. 343–374). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum
- McClelland, D. C. (1985). *Human motivation*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- McClelland, D. C., Koestner, R., & Weinberger, J. (1989). How do self-attributed and implicit motives differ? *Psychological Review*, 96, 690–702. <http://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.96.4.690>
- Miller, G. A., Galanter, E., & Pribram, K. H. (1960). *Plans and the structure of behavior*. New York, NY: Adams Banner Cox.
- Moss, S. (2016). *Personality systems interaction theory*. Retrieved from <http://www.sicotests.com/psyarticle.asp?id=78>
- Read, S. J., Vanman, E. J., & Miller, L. C. (1997). Connectionism, parallel constraint satisfaction processes, and Gestalt principles: (Re)introducing cognitive dynamics to social psychology. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 1(1), 26–53. http://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr0101_3
- Rogers, C. R. (1964). Toward a modern approach to values: The valuing process in the mature person. *Journal of Abnormal & Social Psychology*, 68, 160–167. <http://doi.org/10.1037/h0046419>
- Ryan, R. M., & Connell, J. P. (1989). Perceived locus of causality and internalization: Examining reasons for acting in two domains. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57, 749–761. <http://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.57.5.749>
- Sheldon, K. M. (1994). Emotionality differences between artists and scientists. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 28, 481–491. <http://doi.org/10.1006/jrpe.1994.1034>
- Sheldon, K. M. (1995). Creativity and goal conflict. *Creativity Research Journal*, 8, 299–306. http://doi.org/10.1207/s15326934crj0803_9
- Sheldon, K. M. (2005). Positive value change during college: Normative trends and individual differences. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 39, 209–223. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2004.02.002>
- Sheldon, K. M. (2009). Goal-striving across the life-span: Do people learn to select more self-concordant goals as they age? In M. C. Smith & T. G. Reio (Eds.), *The handbook of research on adult development and learning* (pp. 553–569). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Sheldon, K. M. (2014). Becoming oneself: The central role of self-concordant goal selection. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 18, 349–365. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1088868314538549>
- Sheldon, K. M., Arndt, J., & Houser-Marko, L. (2003). In search of the organismic valuing process: The human tendency to move towards beneficial goal choices. *Journal of Personality*, 71, 835–869. <http://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6494.7105006>
- Sheldon, K. M. & Cooper, M. L. (2008). Goal striving within agentic and communal roles: Functionally independent pathways to enhanced well-being. *Journal of Personality*, 76, 415–447. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2008.00491.x>
- Sheldon, K. M., & Elliot, A. J. (1998). Not all personal goals are personal: Comparing autonomous and controlled reasons as predictors of effort and attainment. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 24, 546–557. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0146167298245010>
- Sheldon, K. M. & Elliot, A. J. (1999). Goal striving, need-satisfaction, and longitudinal well-being: The Self-Concordance Model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 76, 482–497. <http://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.76.3.482>

- Sheldon, K. M., & Emmons, R. A. (1995). Comparing differentiation and integration within personal goal systems. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 18, 39–46. [http://doi.org/10.1016/0191-8869\(94\)00131-B](http://doi.org/10.1016/0191-8869(94)00131-B)
- Sheldon, K. M., Houser-Marko, L., & Kasser, T. (2006). Does autonomy increase with age? Comparing the motivation and well-being of college students and their parents. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 40, 168–178. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2004.10.004>
- Sheldon, K. M., & Kasser, T. (1995). Coherence and congruence: Two aspects of personality integration. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 68, 531–543. <http://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.68.3.531>
- Sheldon, K. M., & Kasser, T. (1998). Pursuing personal goals: Skills enable progress, but not all progress is beneficial. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 24, 1319–1331. <http://doi.org/10.1177/01461672982412006>
- Sheldon, K. M., & Kasser, T. (2001). Getting older, getting better? Personal strivings and personality development across the life-course. *Developmental Psychology*, 37, 491–501. <http://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.37.4.491>
- Sheldon, K. M., Kasser, T., Houser-Marko, L., Jones, T., & Turban, D. (2005). Doing one's duty: Chronological age, felt autonomy, and subjective well-being. *European Journal of Personality*, 19, 97–115. <http://doi.org/10.1002/per.535>
- Sheldon, K. M. & Krieger, L. (2004). Does law school undermine law students? Examining changes in goals, values, and well-being. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 22, 261–286. <http://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.582>
- Sheldon, K. M., Prentice, M., & Halusic, M. (2016). *Going with the gut, then the heart: A two stage process for evaluating organismic congruence*. Manuscript in preparation.
- Sheldon, K. M., Prentice, M., Halusic, M., & Schüler, J. (2015). Matches between assigned goal-types and both implicit and explicit motive dispositions predict goal self-concordance. *Motivation and Emotion*, 39, 335–343. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-014-9468-4>
- Sheldon, K. M. & Schüler, J. (2011). Needing, wanting, and having: Integrating motive disposition theory and self-determination theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101, 1106–1123. <http://doi.org/10.1037/a0024952>
- Werner, H. (1957). The concept of development from a comparative and organismic point of view. In D. Harris (Ed.), *The concept of development* (pp. 125–147). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Wuyts, D., Vansteenkiste, M., Soenens, B., & Assor, A. (2015). An examination of the dynamics involved in parental child-invested contingent self-esteem. *Parenting: Science and Practice*, 15(2), 55–74. <http://doi.org/10.1080/15295192.2015.1020135>